

VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS

He Is Risen Indeed!

by Ezekiel Bozikis

*"Christ is risen from the dead, by death
trampling upon death, and has bestowed
Life to those in the tombs."*

We all chant this hymn every Pascha; but how many of us understand what we are saying, and if we do, do we believe it? And yet this hymn reveals the answer to humanity's most perplexing problem - death. Whether you accept it, or ignore it, death is something each one of us will have to face one day. Indeed, most people avoid thinking about it. Others are so fearful of it they can't stop thinking about it, and spend all their resources trying to postpone it.

The sad thing is that Christians, including Orthodox Christians, have also been wasting their time and money in futility attempting to cheat death; and the irony is that we already have the solution!

The key claim of Christianity is that Jesus Christ, being fully man and fully God, overcame death by His death and resurrection. Thus, to all who believe in Him and obey His commandments, death has no power over them - they simply pass from life to life! If Christ

never rose from the dead, then our whole Christian faith is pointless! Christ died during the Jewish Pascha (or "Passover") festival. That was not a coincidence. To understand the meaning of



The Resurrection.

This icon and others are available at the bookshop, which is open every Saturday night after English Liturgy.

Pascha we need to go back to the dawn of history - to Adam and Eve.

Our ancestors lived in total innocence, having no experience of pain, or sorrow, or death. God, to test their love for Him, commanded them not to eat the fruit of a particular tree. Instead of trusting their creator who had given them life and a whole, beautiful unspoiled world, they believed the devil's lies and disobeyed Him. Then their innocence was lost and they were filled with guilt and shame.

God, though He loved them and grieved deeply, was forced to pronounce judgement on our foreparents. But, He also pronounced judgement on the devil by foretelling that the seed of the woman (Christ) would ultimately defeat Satan.

Then God showed Adam and Eve what the price of sin was: He took two animals (probably lambs), killed them, and used their skins to clothe the naked humans.

Witnessing death for the first time would have been a traumatic experience for our foreparents. It definitely would have reinforced the magnitude of their sin. They weren't just being punished for stealing an apple - the spiritual ramifications run much deeper. God had made Adam and Eve stewards of the earth; by disobeying Satan, they had effectively handed the devil the "title-deeds" to the earth! Everything on earth, including humans, were now slaves to Satan.

The only way Adam and Eve could now approach God was through animal sacrifices. A lamb would be sacrificed in substitute for their sins. This they taught to their children. Abel followed their example, while Cain rebelled and eventually murdered his brother.

Thousands of years later, God's chosen people were slaves in Egypt. God sent His

servant Moses to command Pharaoh to let the Hebrews go free. Pharaoh refused and God sent plagues down on Egypt.

The tenth and last plague was the worst: God announced that He would send the angel of death throughout Egypt to slay the firstborn sons in all households - from the Pharaoh's palace down to his humblest servant's.

And what were the Hebrews to do to save their firstborn? They were to take a lamb, one for each household, slaughter it, and paint the door-lintel and posts with its blood. Thus, when the angel of death went abroad that night, he saw the blood of the lamb on the doors of the Hebrew houses and he passed over them (hence "Passover" or "Pascha").

About 1500 years later, Jesus of Nazareth came to the River Jordan to be baptized by John the Baptist. On seeing Him, the Baptist cried, "Behold! The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29)

Do you see the picture? The whole history of substitutory animal sacrifices prefigured Christ's sacrifice. But, while animal sacrifices simply "hid" our sins from God's sight, Christ's removes our sins completely; and while animal sacrifices had to be constantly repeated, Christ's perfect sacrifice is a once only, never to be repeated event - capable of cleansing all human beings who ever lived and who ever will.

But why did God himself have to die for us? There was no other way. "The wages of sin is death." (Romans 6:23). Death is not simply the separation of the soul from the body (physical death); it is also the separation of our souls from God - which is eternal torment. The only way for us to escape death was for someone to pay the penalty for us. That "someone" could not be himself guilty of sin or it would defeat the purpose. Somehow, a human being had to be found who was without any sin, obeyed God perfectly throughout his life, and who was willing to die for the rest of the world.

Obviously, unless God intervened, no such person would be found. Thus, God the Son became human - not in appearance only; He truly assumed flesh and blood and became the same as we are, so that he could truly enter death and bring us salvation. Christ destroyed the devil's power by using the devil's strongest weapon - death itself.

You see, there's a relationship between sin and death: each one leads to the other. Sin causes death, and the fear of death leads one to sin and thus to bondage (Rom 5:12). Christ sets us free from this bondage of sin and death.

So, what does all this mean to us? We have seen that the Passover prefigures the new deliverance for humanity by Christ from the power of sin and death. God calls us to our own personal "Passover". By repenting of our sins and accepting Christ as our Saviour we are covered by His blood and "passed over" by the angel of death; and, if we remain faithful to Christ to the end, we are promised immortal life.

Thus, with joy we can sing: "O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?" (I Corin 15:55)

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OCYF



The Orthodox
Christian Youth
Fellowship of St
George will be

holding a youth retreat at Mount Tamborine on Saturday 7th May to Sunday 8th May. The weekend will incorporate talks, discussions, games, walks, cooking, Fellowship and an evening Vesper Service.

Age - 13 years upwards.

For more information, contact Helen Demitriou 8231065 (H), 8414444(W).

ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN STUDENT FELLOWSHIP

Meetings are held at Queensland University St Lucia Campus each week on Tuesday at lunch, 1pm to 2pm, in Rm 226 Health Service (Gordon Greenwood Building).

Usually a discussion or presentation is conducted concerning the Orthodox Church.

All are welcome.

Holy and Saints Days to Remember

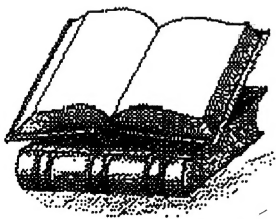
April 3	Cross Veneration Sunday
April 15	Akathist Hymn
April 17	Sunday of St Mary of Egypt
April 10	Sunday of St John Climacus
April 23	Lazarus Saturday
April 24	PALM SUNDAY
April 25 to 30	Holy and Great Week
April 29	GOOD FRIDAY
May 1	HOLY PASCHA
May 2	Feast of Saint George

Details are available at the Candel desk on Saturday nights.

The Choir Is Expanding

The English Liturgy Choir is expanding in order to cope with the ever-increasing demand for English Liturgies, weddings, baptisms and other services. We would like to increase the size of the choir to the point where we can have a functional choir at every service without requiring the same people to sing at every service.

There is no audition (most of the choir has no previous musical experience), and it is a lot of fun as well as rewarding. If you are interested / curious / breathing, call Nick Inglis (349 4540) or Patra Ganis (398 5398).



BOOK REVIEWS

Our bookstore is open every Saturday after the English Liturgy. Many books are available, only three of which are discussed below. A major order of new books is due in May.

Lent.

Holy Week Service Book

\$32

This book is indispensable for those who wish to follow the services during Holy Week. All the major services are included in both Greek and English.

Great Lent - By Fr. Schmermann.

\$12

This book, the work of an eminent Orthodox Theologian, is an excellent introduction to the Lenten Season. The book explains the structure of the Services, the reasons for fasting and the correct approach to Holy Communion. The book is written in simple English and is essential reading for those who want to fully participate in Lenten worship.

General.

The Orthodox Church

- Bishop Kallistos (Timothy) Ware
Penguin Books 1993

\$17

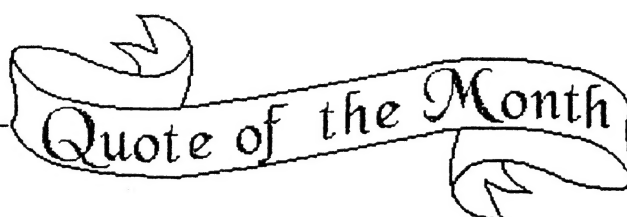
The only introduction to the Orthodox Church written by a Bishop of our Church. This book is perhaps the best introduction into the Orthodox Church in English. It includes an account of the history of the Church and deals with the Church's major teachings. It includes a comprehensive reading list which is of great assistance in discovering books published on areas of further interest. Available at all major bookstores.

THE FALL: Original Sin

God gave Adam free will - the power to choose between good and evil. But, instead of continuing along the path marked out for him by God, Adam turned aside and disobeyed God. Adam's fall consisted essentially in his disobedience of the will of God; he set up his own will against the divine will, and so by his own act he separated himself from God. As a result, a new form of existence appeared on earth - that of disease and death. By turning away from God, who is immortality and life, man put himself in a state that was contrary to nature, and this unnatural condition led to an inevitable disintegration of his being and eventually to physical death. The consequences of Adam's disobedience extended to all his descendants. We are members one of another, as Saint Paul never ceased to insist, and if one member suffers the whole body suffers. In virtue of this mysterious unity of the human race, not only Adam but all humanity became subject to mortality. Nor was the disintegration which followed from the fall merely physical. Cut off from God, Adam and his descendants passed under the domination of sin and of the devil. Each new human being is born into a world where sin prevails everywhere, a world in which it is easy to do evil and hard to do good.

Most Orthodox theologians reject the idea of 'original guilt', put forward by Augustine and still accepted by the Roman Catholic Church. Human beings automatically inherit Adam's corruption and mortality, but not his guilt: they are only guilty in so far as by their own free choice they imitate Adam. And Orthodox have never held that unbaptized babies, because tainted with original guilt, are consigned by the just God to the everlasting flames of Hell. The Orthodox picture of fallen humanity is far less sombre than the Augustinian or Calvinist view.

But, although Orthodox maintain that man after the fall still possessed free will and was still capable of good actions, yet they certainly agree with the west in believing that man's sin had set up between him and God a barrier, which man by his own efforts could never break down. Sin blocked the path to union with God. Since man could not come to God, God came to man.



He endured nails in his innocent hands and feet, suffering terrible pains; but he allows you to share in his death without agony and effort. He was physically buried in the earth; you are symbolically when you come up from the font, born again, a completely changed person. From now on you no longer belong to Adam and the old way of life; you belong to Christ, who lives for God in perfect freedom from sin.

Theodore of Mopuestia



Miraculous icon of Saint Mavra on the island of Zakynthos, Greece.

SAINT TIMOTHY AND SAINT MAVRA

(Their memory is celebrated 3 May)

The setting is Thebes in Egypt, toward the end of the 3rd century AD. A handsome, young couple, dedicated to their faith, are uniting in Holy Matrimony.

From the first days of their marriage, Timothy and Mavra commenced their deeds with greater zeal. Passionate for the Holy Belief, Timothy preached in the churches, in the streets and town squares. Hundreds of pagans and Christians listened fervently to his words and many were baptised. Some even gained such strength that they longed to become martyrs. In turn, Mavra comforted the sick, the elderly and the orphans of the city. To them she was the Angel of love whom they depended on.

During that time, the governor of Thebes was Arianos, who hated and persecuted the Christians. It didn't take him long to learn of Timothy's and Mavra's activities. Just twenty days after their marriage, Timothy was summoned to appear before Arianos, accused of "believing in Christ and alluring many pagans to Christianity". Timothy refused to hand over to Arianos the holy books he used to teach the people and in so doing was led away to be tortured. Arianos believed, that in this way, Timothy would either be persuaded to carry out his command or finally, receive what he deserved - death.

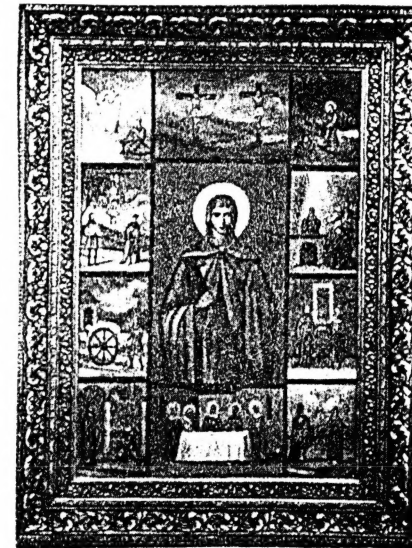
But he was wrong. Timothy endured the torture with admirable forbearance and exemplary endurance. A multitude of pagans curiously observed with horror the saint's ordeal, while many Christians prayed passionately as they looked on. Among them was Mavra, just 18 years old, her heart aflame with love and faith in Christ - armed with the strength and grace of God.

She stood by her husband, supporting and comforting him over the ensuing days. As soon as Arianos learned that she was Timothy's wife he seized her, thinking that she would be bait for Timothy to succumb to his demands. Initially he tried diplomatically to make her renounce her faith, but when this failed he led her away to be tortured as well.

Mavra thanked God for giving her the strength to remain firm in her belief. She tolerated the suffering because she was living these torturous moments for Christ.

Arianos' rage and desperation reached its ultimate point. He ordered the most humiliating death for Timothy and Mavra - "death by crucifixion". Overwhelmed by their strong faith they were happy and elated. For them it was an honour to die on the cross, just like their Saviour.

It was a slow death. For several days they remained on the cross, enduring the pain and thirst, until finally their holy spirit ascended into Heaven.



Saint Mavra. Scenes of her martyrdom.